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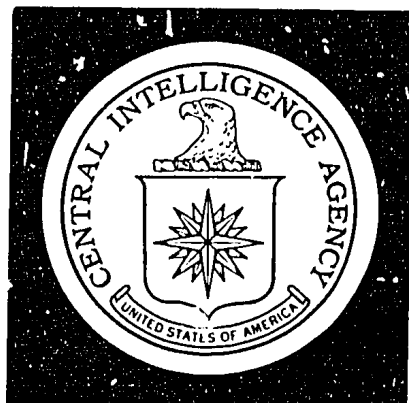
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

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Intelligence Memorandum

*Stepped-Up Communist Resupply Campaign In Southern Laos
And Cambodia*

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February 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
February 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Stepped-Up Communist Resupply Campaign
In Southern Laos And Cambodia

Summary

Ever since the Allied incursions into Cambodia and the closing of the port of Kompong Som (formerly Sihanoukville) to Communist supplies, it has been apparent that during this dry season Hanoi would be facing its biggest logistic challenge in the Laotian Panhandle to date. During the summer and early fall, there were numerous indications that the Communists recognized this challenge and were taking concrete measures to meet it. These steps included augmenting the logistical and security forces in the Panhandle, establishing new and realigning old logistical commands, and continued expansion of the route system. The kickoff of the North Vietnamese logistical "great general offensive" in the Panhandle occurred on the night of 4 January. Its purpose is to establish a throughput of supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

As the mid-point of the dry season approaches, it is clear that the Communists are beset with a number of problems and have already suffered several significant setbacks. These problems are:

Note: This memorandum, the fourth in a series analyzing Communist logistical activities in southern Laos and Cambodia since October 1970, was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.

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a. The Communist resupply effort got off to a poor start in October because of unexpectedly heavy rains in the Panhandle and intensive bombing of the entry corridors. This caused a month's delay in starting the resupply effort in Laos.

b. The augmentation of Communist security and logistical forces in the Panhandle required a greater logistical effort to prime the system than previously and means that much higher internal supply requirements in the Panhandle -- about 25% greater than last year -- must be met before a major throughput can flow to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

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d. NVA/PL forces have failed to clear Allied units from the Bolovens Plateau, probably a prerequisite for heavy use of the new western supply route -- Route 23/16 -- that had been planned by the Communists.

e. Ground interdiction operations by friendly irregular forces introduced an element of uncertainty and concern that Hanoi has not been troubled with in years past.

The above problems in part explain why the indicators of current throughput into South Vietnam or Cambodia are relatively few despite the many indications of high levels of logistical activity along the entry corridors into and within the Panhandle. However, the low level of identified throughput is not entirely unexpected. In part it reflects the normal surging of the system whereby the heavy movement of supplies is first

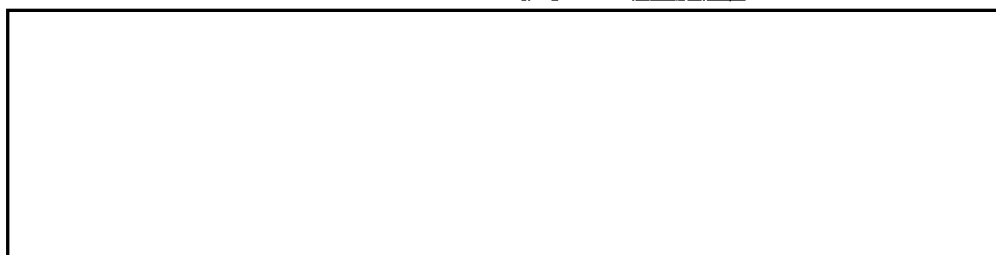
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detected along the entry routes and gradually moves south through the Panhandle and then on the exit routes from Laos. It is still too early to predict how successful the North Vietnamese will be in meeting their current logistic challenge for the season as a whole, but, barring unforeseen circumstances, the indicators of supply throughput should rise significantly within a few weeks.

Logistical Developments in the Laos Panhandle

Recent Organizational Adjustments

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[REDACTED] 559th Transportation Group (TG), was redesignated Headquarters, 470th TG, following its relocation to the tri-border area in October. At the time of the initial move of the Forward Headquarters from Ban Bac to the Binh Tram 37 area, it was believed that the Forward Headquarters was colocated with the Headquarters, 470th TG. Apparently, the experienced cadre of the 559th TG Forward Headquarters, which supervised logistic operations in the southern Panhandle last dry season, were used to form the command structure of the newly organized group. As a result of the reorganization, the 470th TG now exercises control over Binh Tram 36 south of Chavane, Binh Tram 37 in the tri-border area, and Binh Tram 38 at Ban Phone, in addition to maintaining control over the 50 series of Binh Trams. The 470th TG is now the primary logistics authority in extreme southern Laos and in northern Cambodia. Since early September, some 5,700 personnel have been observed in the infiltration pipeline destined for the 470th TG.

2. Binh Tram 31, which relocated to Route 23/16 (see Figure 1, inside back cover) to establish the new 559th TG-controlled north-south supply corridor through the western Panhandle, may have been split into equal elements recently.

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[redacted] the Binh Tram was referred to as Binh Tram 31A and Binh Tram 31B, the Headquarters element probably being A and the Forward Headquarters being B. Such a division would mean that Binh Trams 31A and B would function as autonomous entities -- a reasonable step because of the great distance between Binh Tram 31 and Binh Tram 38, particularly if the Communists still plan to move large quantities of supplies via the Route 23/16 corridor.

3. In mid-January, the 83rd Engineer Regiment with 700 personnel was observed moving south through the Chavane area. The regiment, which operated in the central Panhandle last dry season, is destined to be subordinate to the B-3 Front. A relocation to the Western Highlands of South Vietnam (the B-3 Front's normal area of operations) would be highly unusual because of the continued need for additional construction along the Route 110/97 road complex into northern Cambodia toward Stung Treng. Thus the regiment may be earmarked for construction duty with B-3 Front elements that were shifted to Laos or Cambodia -- either along Route 110 or in the Stung Treng area. Alternatively, if assigned to South Vietnam, the relocation may indicate that the Communists intend to open a second major overland route south through Cambodia from the Binh Tram 37 area. In any event, accelerated road construction in extreme southern Laos and/or northern Cambodia is likely in the near future.

Status of Logistical Facilities

4. The Communists continued to restore and improve parts of their Panhandle logistics system in December and January. By early January the system appeared fully operational, as evidenced by the following developments:

- Additional bypasses had been built in the entry corridors;
- A new north-south artery, Route 99, was opened south of Muong Nong;

- Much of Route 23/16 had been opened;
- Waterborne supply shipments had resumed on the Se Bang Hieng and Se Kong; and
- Most exit routes into South Vietnam and Cambodia were reopened and were being lightly used.

5. In December the observed truck traffic in the Panhandle was largely concentrated between the four entry points and the Tchepone-Muong Nong staging areas, with enemy trucks mainly using the heavily canopied western routes, permitting operations during daylight hours. In early January, aerial reconnaissance recorded a surge of logistic traffic from North Vietnam and along the major roads and waterways into southern Laos. The four access routes from North Vietnam showed increasingly heavy truck traffic moving across the border. Sightings of large numbers of trucks in North Vietnam headed south toward Laos became more frequent. On 12 January, waterborne shipments of supplies on the Se Bang Hieng flowing out of the Western DMZ resumed. Pilots observed 200-300 containers floating in the river -- the first indication of use of this river since the channel guide system was rebuilt in early December.

6. During the week ending 4 January, a number of developments reflected increasing activity further south in the Panhandle. Enemy lines of communication south of the Tchepone-Muong Nong staging areas began evidencing heavy use according to aerial reconnaissance: for the first time this dry season, lines of communication south of Ban Bac began to reflect heavy truck traffic. Route 92/96 still appears to be the primary artery into extreme southern Laos. Forward air controllers (FACs) began reporting fresh repair activity and road grading along Route 96 and parts of Route 110. They also reported construction of a channel guide control system along a 40-50 mile long segment of the Se Kong between Ban Bac and Ban Phone.

Newly constructed Route 99 between Muong Nong and Ban Bac also reflected increasing activity. New truck pull-offs and connector roads continued to be built, numerous antiaircraft positions were prepared along the route, and two new ferry crossings were constructed to provide access across the Se Kong to the Route 92/96 corridor.

7. Recent reports on the status of Route 23/16 are scarce, but villagers living between Saravane and Ban Thateng have reported substantial numbers of trucks carrying supplies moving southward. Most of the vehicle activity detected on Route 23/16 thus far this dry season probably has been in support of enemy operations against friendly positions on and near the Bolovens Plateau. In late December, FACs reported that a 20-mile long bypass road had been recently reopened west of Saravane, making the route motorable from Muong Phine to Ban Phone. However, aerial reconnaissance in late December over the southern parts of Route 23/16 (north of Ban Phone) continued to reflect only light vehicle use. South of Ban Phone the routes were not being used by vehicles. Concurrent with the resumption of use of the Se Bang Hieng, pilots began detecting numerous floating bundles in the Se Kong between Ban Bac and Ban Phone. These supplies (probably rice) presumably are transshipped to trucks or boats near Ban Phone and sent to dispersed storage sites or moved directly to the Cambodian border.

8. Aerial reconnaissance during January along the Laotian-South Vietnamese border indicated that all the motorable exit routes* were open. Reporting by FACs indicates that Route 926 leading toward the A Shau Valley has been sustaining traffic on both sides of the border since mid-December. Route 922 has evidenced the sharpest surge in exit route activity: heavy sustained vehicle use was reported by FACs during the first week of January. Exit Routes 925 and 165/966 also were reported in

* Late December photography continued to show Route 9 east of the Route 9/92 junction to be in disuse and heavily overgrown. Considerable work would have to be done to make the road motorable.

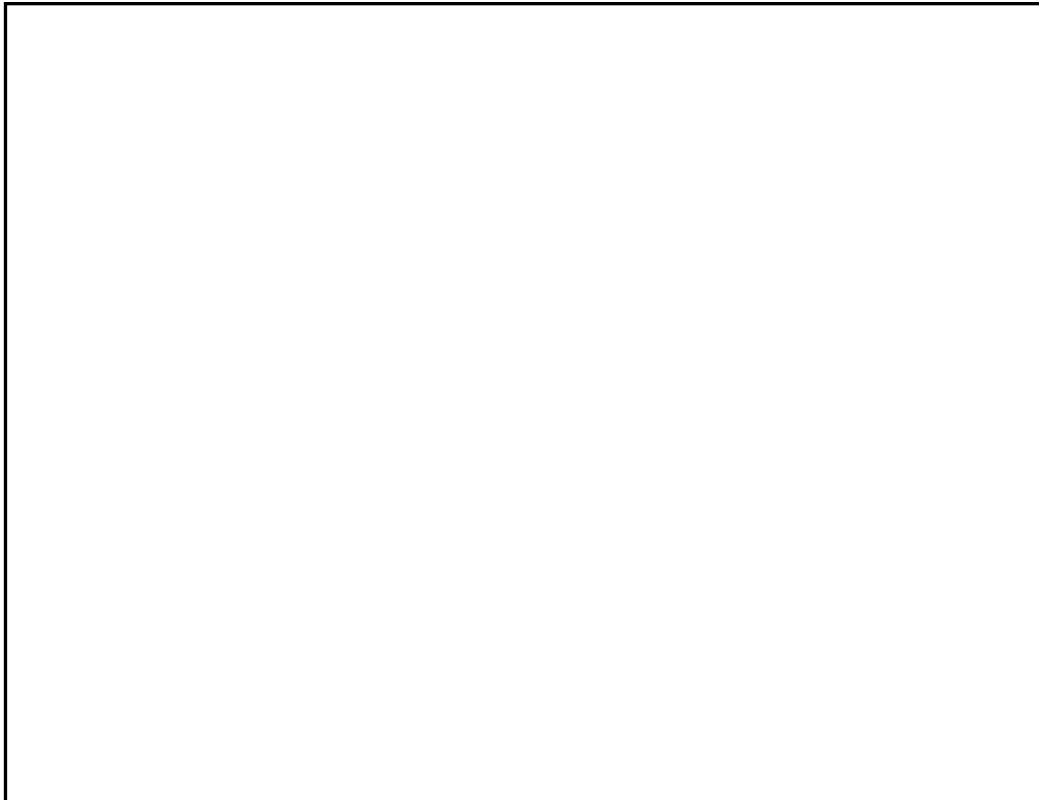
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[REDACTED]

good condition, but as of mid-January showed little sign of vehicle activity near the border, as did that part of Route 110 leading toward South Vietnam.

Supply Movements

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A similar curtailment in transport activity was also noted at the same time last year, just prior to the big transportation push.

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[REDACTED] This year's offensive began at the same time as last year's, indicating that the logistics advantage gained by leaving most of the 559th TG

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[redacted]

in the Panhandle during the 1970 wet season was lost, probably because of the unusual heavy rains in the latter half of October and intensified US bombing.

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12. Further south in the Panhandle, logistic activity also picked up considerably with the initiation of the "general offensive." Binh Tram 41 shipped 68 tons of supplies to South Vietnam via Route 926/616 from 30 December through 20 January. Binh Tram 33 received 120 tons of supplies on 8 and 9 January. Binh Tram 31, which also was participating in the offensive, was recently praised by the 559th TG for outstanding accomplishments. Apparently, the North Vietnamese will attempt to move trucks south from Binh Tram 31 through Binh Tram 38 despite the continued government presence on the Bolovens Plateau. Waterway shipments on the Se Kong are also being used to supplement vehicle activity. Substantial quantities of rice are being transported by water from Binh Tram 35 to Binh Tram 38. Binh Tram 37 was congratulated on 27 January for having achieved 100% of its transportation quota for the B-3 Front for an unspecified period. [redacted]

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13. The overall composition of cargo detected moving during the early stages of the offensive indicates a decrease in emphasis on food and a priority on gasoline shipments. Of the 2,811 tons of supplies shipped from Binh Tram 14 to Binh Tram 32 for the period 1-20 January, 1,549 tons -- 55% -- was food, a sharp decrease from the 77% of total shipments noted moving during late November and early December. POL, on the other hand, accounted for 31% -- 865 tons -- of the total, well above the dry season average of about 15%. Arms, equipment, and ammunition shipments accounted for 397 tons -- 14% -- substantially below the 20%-25% noted in previous dry seasons.

14. Despite the large volume of supplies moving into the Panhandle from North Vietnam in early January, the enemy continues to have difficulties operating his logistic system. Transportation difficulties were evident along the Se Bang Hieng when shipments were halted for three days between two points as a result of air strikes. A similar situation occurred on the Se Kong where air strikes on a transshipment point on 13 January destroyed cargo nets requiring two days to repair.

15. The largest quantity of cargo ever destroyed by air strikes in the Panhandle [redacted]

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[redacted] Allied air strikes against the "H-1 warehouse" near Ban Bac, the largest known storage facility in the southern Panhandle, destroyed 900 tons of supplies and forced the Communists to abandon the facility. Following in the wake of the one-month delay in launching their dry season supply push, the neutralization of H-1 in this critical area of the Panhandle was a further setback for the North Vietnamese.

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16. The failure to secure the Bolovens Plateau, which would have permitted complete use of the western route structure, apparently has

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forced some change in the North Vietnamese transportation effort.

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The route was scheduled to carry 60% of all supply shipments from Binh Tram 33 to Binh Tram 34 south of Muong Nong for an unspecified period. Construction of this route probably was accelerated to facilitate movement of large quantities of supplies initially scheduled for transport on the western Route 23/16 corridor. Although the North Vietnamese are still attempting to use the western corridor during the current offensive, Routes 99 and 92/96 will probably carry most of the cargo moving into the southern Panhandle for at least the next month or so.

17. The move by the Communists to use Route 99 is being contested. On 13 January, four government irregular battalions and four special teams, a total of about 1,000 troops, were inserted by helicopter and attacked Route 99 southwest of Muong Nong.

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Additional security forces as well as the 141st Regiment were moved into the area with orders to engage the "enemy" and clear the area of government irregulars. A sustained Allied presence along the Route 99 complex could have a serious disruptive effect on the amount of supplies being transported and the timing and coordination of the supply offensive.

Other Sources

18. Sensor detections surged sharply on 5 January with the start of the "general offensive" and through 15 January averaged 1,160 detections per day -- slightly higher than a year ago (see Figure 2). Since then, however, they have dropped below last year's level. This has occurred despite the fact that the number of active sensors in place has increased substantially -- 1,036 currently, compared with 550 in

mid-January last year. As the enemy shifts his traffic to counter US bombing, the frequency of detections shifts also, particularly on the main entry corridors into the Panhandle where extreme fluctuations in detections occur. Since 5 January, there also has been a sharp increase in detections in the southern Panhandle, notably on Route 92 north of Ban Bac and on its bypass, Route 99. Sensor-detected truck traffic on the roads south of Chavane has been sporadic and light. Pilot sightings of trucks in the Panhandle also are below last year's level: overall, sightings through 22 January were down some 20%, but much of the shortfall may be attributed to a substantial decrease in attack sorties from last year's level.*

Developments in Cambodia

19. Although evidence of current enemy supply flows into Cambodia continues to be sketchy and incomplete, recent developments along Route 97 and the Tonle Kong in the Laos-Cambodia border area suggest that supply inputs into Cambodia from southern Laos may be increasing. Aerial photography of late December and January indicated that Route 97 -- the Cambodian extension of Laotian Route 110 and a key input corridor -- had been refurbished by the enemy and had begun to sustain light to moderate traffic. The photography showed that new truck parks, transshipment points, bypasses, and supply/storage areas had been developed. On 17 December [redacted]

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[redacted] truck traffic moving in both directions throughout the night. The Tonle Kong, which parallels Route 97 and has been frequently used by the VC/NVA in the past, was also active during the period. New road-water transshipment points were evident in photography along its banks, and about 700 supply containers were noted free-floating down the river north of Siem Pang. [redacted] substantiate enemy supply activity in the area [redacted]

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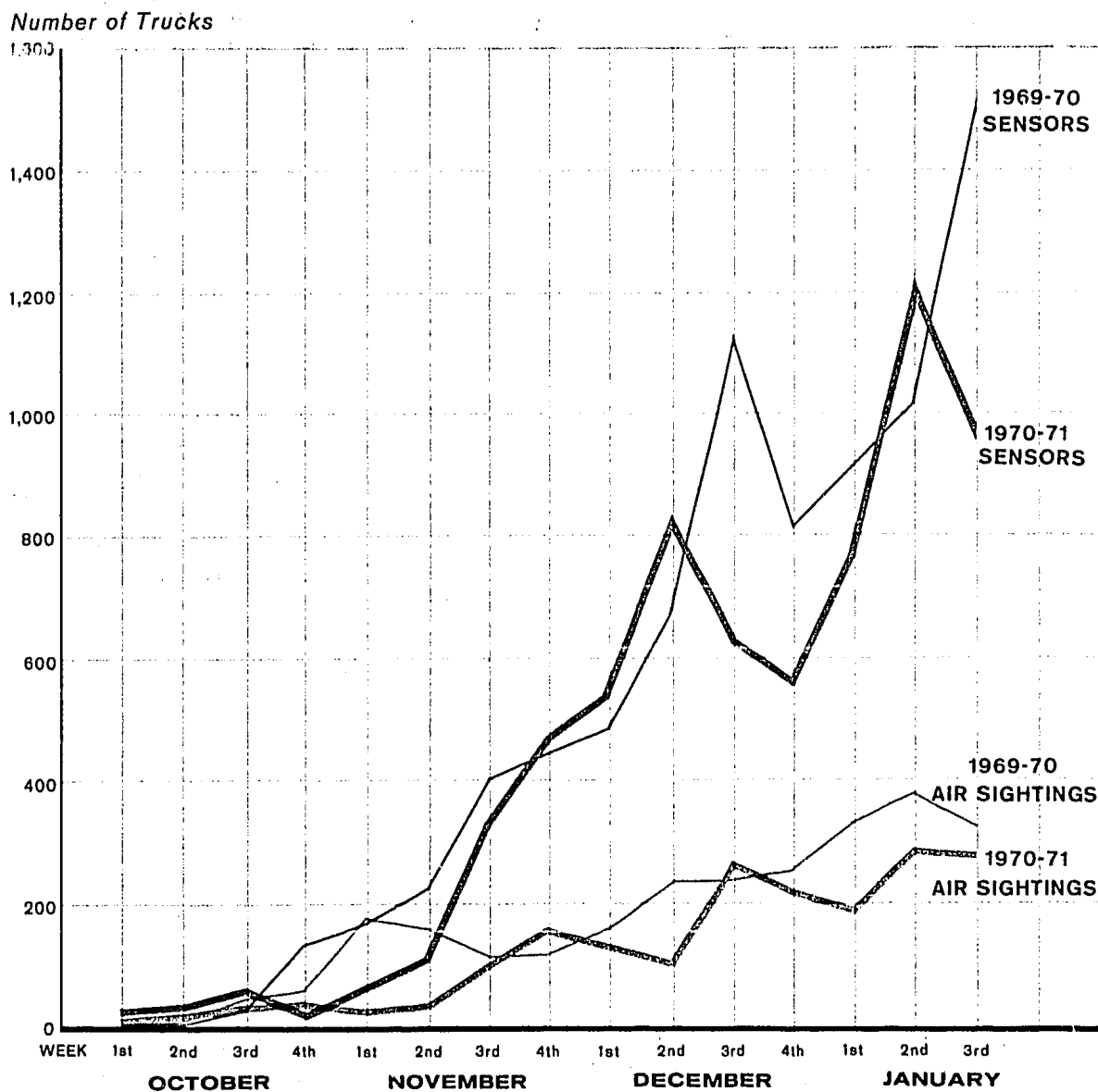
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* *Attack sorties in December -- the latest period for which data are available -- were 17% below those of a year earlier.*

Figure 2

ENEMY TRUCK DETECTIONS IN THE LAOTIAN PANHANDLE**1 October to 22 January, 1969-70 and 1970-71**

NOTE: Points on the graph represent daily average of detections per week. Data are plotted in weekly increments. Numbers of trucks are shown without regard to direction of movement or location. Each method of detection includes unavoidable multiple counting.



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Route 97* and the Tonle Kong have been used to move medicine, ordnance, and food into Cambodia from Attopeu since at least September. Siem Pang, where additional storage facilities have been noted in photography, and Stung Treng have been reported as central supply points from which goods radiate via truck, watercraft, oxcart, and bicycle to Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, and Kratie in the south and Virachei and the B-3 Front to the east.

20. In related developments, aerial photography of 28 December and 8 January showed new clearing activity along segments of secondary roads and trails in northern Cambodia. One area involved is on the east bank of the Mekong about 25 miles south of Stung Treng. This clearing activity probably is a bypass around the 20-mile long Sambor Rapids, a navigable but treacherous segment of the Mekong. The development of this probable bypass suggests that the enemy intends to increase his use of the Mekong south of the evolving Route 97/Tonle Kong corridor into the Kratie-Chhlong area. Extensive clearing has also been noted along portions of trails north of Stung Treng. One alignment forms a bypass for part of Route 13 just south of the Laos border and the other (west of the Mekong) heads northeast off Route 126 toward the river into an area of reported enemy supply facilities. The strategic location of these new segments generally follows past patterns of enemy logistic improvements in Laos and North Vietnam where several routes are developed around a key corridor to increase overall capability and decrease the effectiveness of any interdiction efforts.

21. The available evidence clearly indicates that the enemy has improved his overall transport capability and is probably filtering increased quantities of supplies into Cambodia. Increased security and logistic support for this important corridor also was provided in early January when the 52nd Regiment of the NVA 320th Division re-located from southern Laos to northwest Stung

* 8 January aerial photography indicated that the motorable limit of Route 97 was about 11 miles north of Siem Pang.

Treng Province, joining the 24th and 28th NVA Regiments which have been there since last summer.

22. In southeast Cambodia, no changes in the Communist logistic apparatus have been noted since early December. Groups 300, 400, and 500 (and Rear Service Groups 50 and 82, which moved west into Cambodia at the time of the Allied incursions) are still believed to be operating in the Kratie-Chhlong area. The 41st Transportation Regiment -- first observed in November -- operates south of Chhlong into the Parrot's Beak, an area where large-scale enemy logistic operations, supply points, and rice collection efforts have been noted. A recent rallier has indicated that COSVN intends to consolidate the VC/NVA position in the provinces of Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, and Svay Rieng and to "control" Kompong Cham City. Control of this region would enable the VC/NVA to put continued pressure on Phnom Penh and to extend operations west of the Mekong as well as providing access to Military Regions 3 and 4 in South Vietnam. To date, the enemy has been able to achieve relatively free movement in this region* and has been successful in establishing a fledgling command/control apparatus for further dry season activity. Although continued ARVN incursions in this region have kept the Communists off balance and forced them to allocate units to protect certain areas, they probably have not seriously disrupted enemy logistic movements.

23. Seaborne supply flows into Kampot and Takeo Provinces of Cambodia and Military Region 4 in South Vietnam were recently reported. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the movement of large numbers of trucks both north and south at night. In November, about 150 trucks, some heavily loaded, were heard during five nights on Route 13, while in December, about 70 were heard over a period of about one week moving in the same area. This activity was probably related to rice collection and redistribution efforts in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng Provinces.

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[redacted] during the past several months the Communists have moved supplies by sea to their forces in South Vietnam's Military Region 4 and in the adjacent Cambodian province of Kampot. [redacted]

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[redacted] ordnance and medical supplies are moved by motorized junks from Phu Quoc Island in the Gulf of Thailand to the Pirate Islands about nine miles off the coast. The shipments are then broken down into smaller quantities and moved inland via shallow-draft sampans on the maze of rivers in the region, with some goods distributed to intermediate points along the way. The final destination reportedly is the central supply depot at Kompong Svay in Kampot Province which serves as the main supply/storage point for enemy units there and in South Vietnam's Kien Giang Province.

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[redacted] motorized

junks carry rice and ammunition to offloading points along the Kien Giang coast, [redacted]

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[redacted] The amount of supplies being moved probably is small in view of the continued Market Time patrol of the area.

24. In summary, logistic developments in Cambodia during December and January revealed the first evidence of Communist supply inputs -- still unquantifiable -- into Cambodia and preliminary enemy efforts to improve key Cambodian lines of communication to accommodate increased supply flows in the future. These developments are closely related to the launching of the 559th TG's "general offensive" in Laos in early January and indicate that the logistic network in Cambodia may soon be a viable extension of the Laotian network in support of supply movements to the COSVN area.

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